



Book Reviews

The Inefficient Years

YOUTH AND THE SOCIAL ORDER by F. MUSGROVE

Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1965. 168 pages.

Reviewed by KAI T. ERIKSON

People who spend their time studying the nature of social life have always been intrigued by the way societies divide the human life span into a series of relatively distinct phases. It makes good biological sense, of course, to assume that individuals develop by passing through a graduated set of stages. But societies often impose upon this natural biological rhythm a group of age categories which seem to fit the logic of the social order far better than they do the logic of the human life cycle.

Probably the most curious and most problematic of these age categories in our own society is the one we call "adolescence." We view it as a period of life suspended in time between childhood and adulthood, an awkward half-way status for persons who are thought to have all the dark visceral urges which come with physical maturity but very little of the ordinary good sense which comes with social maturity. Inevitably, we try to reassure ourselves that this period corresponds to some natural stage in the genetics of human growth, but at the same time we remain aware that the very idea of "adolescence" is an invention of our own historical age. Our grandfathers, on the whole, never experienced such an age or even knew it existed: barely one in ten of them went to high schools and fewer still were in the market for those special goods and services which have since become the identifying badges of adolescent status.

Youth and the Social Order is a thoughtful attempt to consider adolescence as a cultural and historical phe-

nomenon. Although the bulk of its arguments and data are keyed to the situation of youth in contemporary England, the book should prove of more than passing interest to readers on this side of the Atlantic as well.

The main burden of Musgrove's account is that "adolescence" is one of the least efficient inventions of the modern industrial age in that it tends to waste a resource which society cannot easily do without—the imagination and energy of its youth. The adolescent, says Musgrove, is really a mature human being who can be distinguished from his elders largely because he is not permitted to participate in the ordinary round of adult activities: we have created a labor market which is too crowded and too specialized to absorb his services, and we have created a new set of social attitudes which portray him as insufficiently seasoned for the responsibilities of parenthood, citizenship, or useful partici-

Carnaby Street in London.

pation in the economic order. Adolescence, then, is a period of postponement; and to make the long wait more palatable, the young gather into a cultural world of their own which is marked by special customs and costumes, special languages and styles, and all the superficial furniture of a separate sub-culture. The idea that young people are vaguely organized into an "adolescent society" is hardly new to American readers, but Musgrove argues for England (much as James S. Coleman argued for the United States) that the contours and even the content of this world are as much a product of adult coercion as a product of adolescent whim or fancy. In America, at least, popular attitudes invite us to assume that the adolescent society is generated by the particular needs and enthusiasms of the young people who live in it, and this gives us the premise we need to explain the note of rebelliousness we think we sense among the young, their capacity for a level of challenge, experiment, and adventure which too quickly turn into perversity and deviation.

Musgrove tells us, however, that these qualities, too, are an adult invention. Adolescents do not reject the values of their elders; it is the elders who reject them, storing them away in a segregated world of their own where they spend most of their time and enormous purchasing power trying to earn eligibility for the adult society. Young people, says Musgrove, are prepared to accept the attitudes and outlooks of their elders with scarcely a second thought, and, if anything, resent their inability to participate in the round of activities described by these values without a trace of con-



cern about the values themselves. So docile are they, in fact, so orthodox in their acceptance of the world as it is, that they are unlikely to mount even a modest challenge to the adult establishment, and this fact depresses Musgrove to the point of real pessimism.

Musgrove's data came from England, of course, but it is unlikely that many American readers will be able to take comfort from the differences between the two countries in the areas of formal education and apprentice training. For instance, Musgrove demonstrates that English adolescents are capable of an almost chilling realism when they are asked to assess the kind of future they can expect as adults. They know within the thinnest margin what occupations they will be eligible for, what wages they will command, what their chances will be for promotion or advancement.

Here, it would seem, we can assume that American adolescents differ from their counterparts in England: in an educational climate designed to rough the edges off individual differences in class, talent, or outlook, American youth are probably freer to dream extravagant futures for themselves. But beyond this, the differences between American and English experience seem less important. Young people in England spend their uneasy apprenticeship learning the dimensions and potentialities of the adult world with a keen eye for detail, but they emerge from this period of reconnaissance with nothing more imaginative than a genial respect for the conditions they have observed there. They are virtually unanimous in their support of the institution of marriage, despite the fears of their elders that they are engaging in sexual adventures beyond description. They accept the quality of adult leadership and express far less hostility toward their parents than popular conviction would lead us to expect. They have little argument with a school system that either freezes them in lower income occupations or exposes them to years of denial, humiliation, self-doubt, and control. If anything, children who lose out in the early assignment of status are more comfortable about the adult world than their colleagues who move into the more favored educational channels.

For all the bits and pieces of data packed into this book, the momentum of

Musgrove's report is carried by his deep sense of concern. He obviously looks forward to social change in English institutions, but cannot imagine where the impetus for that change will originate if not in the energy and challenge of youth, and he fears that young people are no longer in a position to exercise their historical role as initiators of change because they enjoy the prospects of joining the adult establishment too well. Musgrove's book can almost be read as a bright testimonial to the efficiency of the school system. It does exactly what it was designed to do, and Musgrove in England, like Edgar Z. Friedenberg in this country, is really disturbed about the adult establishment which has produced that design. For when one comes right down to it, much of the recent criticism of education amounts to a complaint that the values of the adult world are too faithfully reflected in the character of the schools and that the schools do not encourage those abilities in the young which would permit them to see how shallow these values are. We distrust the educators for not making our young people more lively and curious and demanding than we are ourselves.

In closing, I should note that the task of reviewing this book is made more difficult by two of its virtues. First, the text of Musgrove's argument is informed by material from a remarkable variety of sources. For my own part, I found these excursions into various territories a little uneven in quality. For example, I thought Musgrove's attempts to trace the idea of adolescence in English history far more compelling than his use of psychological studies to demonstrate that adolescence is little more than adulthood writ small. Still, the fact of the matter is that few reviewers could match the scope of Musgrove's interests or the range of his scholarship. All I can report is that I learned a good deal from this thin volume and would recommend the experience to others.

The second problem is that the job has been done in a warm, relevant foreword by Albert K. Cohen. It should be read twice, once before and once after reading the text itself. It would require another review of comparable length to do justice to this short piece, which is both compelling and thoughtful.

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Many Paths to Communism

THE COMMUNIST REVOLUTION IN ASIA, *edited by* ROBERT A. SCALAPINO
Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965.

Reviewed by JOSEPH R. GUSFIELD

The growing independence of Eastern European countries and the Sino-Soviet split has greatly revised American conceptions of a single united and uniform Communist movement. As our understanding of Asia grows with study and involvement we also become aware that the most populous of continents is neither a single civilization nor a common political structure. In this collection of papers on the tactics, structure, ideologies, and achievements of Communist parties in 12 Asian countries, we are clearly made aware of the national contexts within which Communist movements have emerged and operate.

The misleading character of the title is perhaps the most important fact about the picture of Asian communism drawn by these scholars of Asian studies writing in isolation from each other. There is no single Communist revolution in Asia and many Communist parties and movements are scarcely revolutionary. There is a great deal of difference between the militancy and dogmatism of an entrenched Communist regime such as North Vietnam, an insurrectionist movement such as that of Malaysia, or an accepted part of the system of competitive politics such as Indonesian communism was and as, in the main, the